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November 30, 2007 01:58 pm

Edmondson v. State?

Editor, Daily Press:

Oklahoma Attorney General Drew Edmondson's latest effort to keep the poultry lawsuit in the headlines illustrates the problems inherent with the state's leading law-enforcement official promoting a lawsuit like a carnival huckster.

With regard to bacteria in our streams, Bill Cauthron with the Oklahoma Water Resources Board reported to the Scenic Rivers Commission in June 2006 that 82 percent of streams in Oklahoma did not meet primary body-contact standards. Bacteria in our streams is a statewide problem. Cauthron further reported the Environmental Protection Agency is investigating to see if the criteria is flawed or if there is an actual public health risk.

Water quality in Oklahoma streams is in need of an overall long-term strategy to reduce nutrient and bacteria excesses. But the Edmondson strategy of using water quality as a smokescreen for political gain and campaign donations from trial lawyers is no solution. As the poultry litigation has proceeded, Edmondson's claims have become more hysterical.

The latest publicity stunt to ban poultry litter application in the Illinois River watershed shows the hypocrisy of the Edmondson doctrine. In apparent need of a holiday headline, Mr. Edmondson claimed health concerns as the basis for demanding poultry litter be banned, but only in the Illinois River watershed -- not even mentioning the Eucha-Spavinaw watershed serving Tulsa, or any litter being applied elsewhere in Oklahoma.

If poultry litter is a health hazard, are the lives of Tulsa children and other Oklahoma children less important? Of course not. The truth is, Mr. Edmondson does not believe his own press releases, counting instead on a friendly press corps who will ask no questions, regardless of the absurdity of the argument.

In spite of the pressure, other state agencies have been hard at work on water quality. The Scenic Rivers Commission promoted and got mega-millions of dollars committed from Arkansas cities to protect our water in their wastewater treatment upgrades. The poultry industry and the city of Tulsa provided seed money to fund Oklahoma's first Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program to lease vegetation zones along our streams.

The Conservation Commission, the Department of Environmental Quality, and the Department of Agriculture have taken aggressive steps to protect and promote protecting water quality in general, and scenic streams in particular. Poultry industry dollars have even been used to help pay for U.S. Geological Survey water-quality sampling. The real work of water quality improvement is difficult, tedious, and seldom commands headlines, but it continues.

Listening to Mr. Edmondson, one is left with only one conclusion: All state employees in Oklahoma are incompetent or worse when it comes to protecting water quality. Perhaps this is because, as the case moves closer to trial, it appears the witness list for poultry companies named in Mr. Edmondson's suit will read like a who's who of Oklahoma state government. Mr. Edmondson will find himself in the uncomfortable position of attacking virtually every state agency employee as negligent or criminal.

Is this a formula for success?

Rick Stubblefield, Adair County Representative
Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission

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